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## ComEd customers may foot bill for grid upgrade

By Hal Dardick | Tribune Reporter  
7:25 PM CDT, June 3, 2008

ComEd customers might be asked to pay a permanent \$3 monthly surcharge so the company can augment its electricity delivery system with the latest technology, the utility's leader said Tuesday at a [Chicago City Council](#) committee meeting.

The upgrades, a combination of new digital technologies called "smart grid," would allow ComEd to know when an outage occurs without a call from an affected customer, said ComEd president and chief operating officer J. Barry Mitchell. It also would allow remote switching of circuits that now can only be flipped manually.

"The initial phase of smart grid would incorporate technology proven to lead to fewer and shorter outages and strengthen the system infrastructure," Mitchell said. "Our vision for smart grid would provide customers with real-time data to make better-informed choices about their electricity use with advanced meters and automated self-healing distribution equipment to drastically reduce outage duration."

Mitchell said northern Illinois customers would be assessed fees that ultimately would climb to \$3 a month. He said the charge for the \$1 billion system likely would continue indefinitely to pay for maintenance.

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David Kolata, executive director of the watchdog Citizens Utility Board, said his organization supports smart-grid technologies but questions the need for the surcharge, which he said might not even result in the building of "a true smart grid."

ComEd has asked the Illinois Commerce Commission for preliminary approval of the system, but company officials said they would not implement it unless municipal leaders and citizens favored the idea at "workshops" yet to be held.

Meanwhile, the non-profit Galvin Electricity Initiative, an organization run by former Motorola chief Robert Galvin, convened a kick-off meeting Tuesday of the Illinois Smart Grid Initiative. [Mayor Richard Daley](#) and former U.S. House

Speaker Dennis Hastert are co-chairmen of the event.

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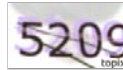
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